

First to the gun 11/26/67

NEW YORK, Jan. 23 (UPI). — President Kennedy, disturbed by a black-bordered "welcome" advertisement in a Dallas newspaper, acted out his own assassination two hours before it happened, telling Mrs. Kennedy, "We're heading into nut country today."

The ironic scene is depicted in the second Look Magazine installment of William Manchester's book, "The Death of a President," published Monday. The article pictures President Johnson as dazed by the slaying and fearful of a plot against his own life, while Mrs. Johnson wrote her impressions in a notebook reserved for "never-to-be-forgotten moments."

Manchester questions the ability of Mr. Kennedy's Secret Service bodyguard to cope with the situation, noting that "the reflexes of the agents nearest the President were crucial in those seconds after the first shot was fired." He accused them of being "immobilized" while Lee Harvey Oswald took deliberate aim for his final shot.

SECRET SERVICE UNSURE

In addition, the Secret Service was unsure of its allegiance—to the Kennedys or Mr. Johnson—after the assassination, and instead of being "a symbol of continuity, was riven by disunion," Manchester wrote. The agents followed personal loyalties, he said, and "the inevitable consequence was anarchy."

The fear that mounted to bloody terror in Dallas' Dealey Plaza and climaxed in chaos and suspicion at Parkland Hospital on Nov. 22, 1963, first gripped the Kennedys in a hotel room in Fort Worth as they waited for the flight to Dallas. Acting Press Secretary Mac Kilguff showed the President the advertisement in the Dallas paper.

The ad in the Dallas News, under the heading, "Welcome, Mr. Kennedy to Dallas," accused the President of responsibility for the imprisonment, starvation and persecution of "thousands of Cubans," and said he was selling food to Communist soldiers who were killing Americans in Vietnam. The ad hinted that President Kennedy

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JFK Acted Out Own Slaying, Look Reports

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Mr. Kennedy to Dallas," accused the President of responsibility for the imprisonment, starvation and persecution of "thousands of Cubans," and said he was selling food to Communist soldiers who were killing Americans in Vietnam. The ad hinted that President Kennedy had reached a secret agreement with the Communist Party in the United States.

FACE WAS GRIM

"He read each word," Manchester reports. "His face was grim, and he handed it to Jackie. Her vivacity disappeared; she felt sick. The President shook his head. Slowly, he said to her, 'Oh, you know, we're going into nut country today.'"

Then in what the author described as an "007 caper," Mr. Kennedy observed that the night before when they arrived at the hotel "would have been a hell of a night to assassinate a President."

"I mean it," he said. "There was the rain, and the night, and we were all getting jostled. Suppose a man had a pistol in a briefcase." He gestured vividly, pointing his rigid index finger at the wall and jerking his thumb twice to show the action of the hammer. "Then he could have dropped the gun and the briefcase" — in pantomime, he dropped them and whirled in a tense crouch — and melted away in a crowd."

FEW DETAILS SPARED

Manchester said it was Mr. Kennedy's way of shaking off the effects of the ad. He described the President as speaking casually and Mrs. Kennedy taking it lightly.

Manchester relates that Bernard Weissman, the salesman who signed the ad, holed up in a bar for four hours after hearing of the assassination because he feared he would be blamed.

He quoted him as saying of the assassin: "I hope he is not a member of the Walker (right-wing Gen. Edwin Walker) group."

The article provided a minute-by-minute account of the tragedy, sparing few of the details. It is critical of police for not spotting Oswald in the book depository building window, as four witnesses reported doing, of the haphazard placement of the White House physician in a car near the rear of the motorcade, and an "almost total collapse" in discipline on the part of the hospital staff.

5 TERRIBLE SECONDS

After the first shot, which wounded Mr. Kennedy but not fatally, the President's bodyguards "were in a position to take evasive action . . . but for five terrible seconds, they were immobilized," Manchester said.

The author charged that White House bodyguards are not subjected to reflex tests, such as are given to airlines pilots, and are assigned to their jobs because of seniority, although agents admit that at 40 a man on this detail is "old." The two in the presidential car were Roy Kellerman, 35, and the driver, an agent named Greer, 48.

It was the second bullet that destroyed the President's brain. The damage to the skull and the "red sheet" of blood convinced the First Lady that her husband was dead. She was amazed to find out later at the hospital that he was still clinically alive and decided to enter the tiny room where 14 doctors surrounded the President, though only three were necessary, according to Manchester.

STRUGGLED WITH NURSE

"I want to be in there when he dies," she explained to White House physician Dr. George Burkley as she struggled with a nurse who adamantly refused her admittance. He told the nurse it was Mrs. Kennedy's "prerogative" and led her in. A few minutes later it was all over and surgeon Kemp Clark told the widow:

"Your husband has sustained a fatal wound." The lips moved silently: "I know."

"Lyndon and I didn't speak," Manchester quoted Mrs. Johnson as saying. "We just looked at each other, exchanging messages with our eyes. We know what it might be."

TIME FOR PRAYER

Mr. Johnson was far readier to take orders than to issue them, Manchester wrote. He told Rep. Homer Thornberry in a feeble whisper, "This is a

time for prayer if there ever was one, Homer.' . . . Mrs. Johnson, who always carried notebooks to record what she called her never-to-be forgotten moments, produced one from her purse and was rapidly writing down her impressions."

Mr. Johnson finally suggested flying to Carswell Strategic Air Command Base near Fort Worth for safety, but it was decided this was too far. Ken O'Donnell of the Kennedy staff confirmed Mr. Kennedy's death to Mr. Johnson and Manchester quotes him as saying the new President "raised the possibility of a conspiracy."

The Johnson party left soon after for Dallas' Love Field where the presidential and vice presidential jets were waiting. Kennedy aide Kilduff was the first to address Mr. Johnson as "Mr. President."

"He looked at me like I was Donald Duck," Manchester quotes Kilduff as saying.